

A

## R E V I E W

OF

DR. McCULLOH'S

"EXPOSITION OF THE EVIDENCES AND DOCTRINES

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION."

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## REVIEW.

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*An Impartial Exposition of the Evidences and Doctrines of the Christian Religion, addressed to the better educated Classes of Society, by J. H. McCULLOH, JR., M. D., Author of "Researches, Philosophical and Antiquarian, concerning the Aboriginal History of America."* Baltimore : Armstrong & Berry. 1836. 8vo. pp. 346.

It is not often that we are presented with a theological treatise by a layman ; not so often as we could wish. There are reasons why we should regard such productions with peculiar interest. Though usually less furnished with theological learning, laymen possess some decided advantages for religious investigation. They can speak out without fear of a congregation, presbytery, bishop, or synod ; and though they cannot be supposed to be so far exempt from the common weaknesses of our nature as to be free from all party biases, they are certainly less liable to partiality than the professed divine, who must be supposed to be enlisted by connexion, by interest, or by sympathy on one side or the other of the great questions which divide the Christian church.

These considerations apply with peculiar force to a work on the Evidences. What has a layman to gain by vindicating the truth of Christianity ? His temporal interests are not at all at stake. His pride cannot be enlisted to establish the respectability of that which makes him respectable. We are disposed, then, to receive what he says as his simple and honest



convictions, which he promulgates to the world, only because he deems them true and important.

Another consideration, which makes lay theology peculiarly worthy of regard, is the fact, that the clergy, as a body, are apt to lag behind the people in the march of opinion. Such has been hitherto the organization of church establishments, that it has been unsafe for the clergy, either to examine for themselves, or to avow their opinions. It is certainly folly, — when a man's opinions have been manufactured to his hand by some provident council ages ago, and he has pledged himself to maintain them at all events, — to go over again the grounds on which they are understood to rest. If he comes to the same result, he only believes *with* evidence what he before believed *without*. If he comes to a different conclusion, he has condemned himself to be either a heretic or a hypocrite for the rest of his life. The clergy, therefore, need occasionally to hear some awakening note from the people to urge them forward, or at least to save them from being left entirely in the rear.

We repeat it, therefore, we are glad to see such books as this. We are glad to see a full, free, independent expression of individual opinion. It is in this way alone, that any thing valuable can be added to theological knowledge. The repetition of other men's ideas, the emptying of one book into another, does us no good. Let every man state precisely what is in his own mind. No matter if it be eccentric or paradoxical, provided that it is sincerely held, and has been well considered. Let him give us the impressions which any subject makes on his own intellect, and then we have another independent suffrage, or at least one more distinct intellectual phenomenon, to further our investigation of truth.

The treatise under review had its origin, as the author states in his Preface, in parental solicitude.

“When I first undertook to write the following Essay, I had no intention whatever of making it public. I was solely influenced by the suggestions of parental solicitude to prepare something that should assist my own children to the better comprehension of a subject, which I deemed of all others most important. But, when the work was nearly finished, it seemed to me that its publication could not but have a beneficial influence at the present time, when the institutions of the civilized world seem to be on

the eve of a great change, in which new opinions must subvert ancient prejudices, and society be regulated by a theory of principles very different from those, which have hitherto influenced the interests of mankind." — p. v.

We are glad that he has published his thoughts. As yet, it is true, they have not made much noise except in his own immediate vicinity, and probably never will make much. They present, nevertheless, a sufficiently clear and able exposition of a state of mind on religious subjects by no means peculiar to the Author, but common to a large number of religious and inquiring laymen throughout the country, who, like him, still continue attached to Orthodox churches, though they have renounced Orthodoxy itself, and are feeling about, with such helps as they can command, to find some other and better foundation of trust. The volume is interesting and valuable, therefore, as indicating a change which is everywhere passing over intelligent and active minds among the Orthodox, not professionally fettered, and the direction which this change is beginning to take; and it is chiefly on this account, that we are led to notice it so much at length in this journal.

The plan here pursued in the discussion of the Christian Evidences, though not new, differs from the common one. Most writers on this subject have availed themselves of whatever assistance they supposed might be derived to our faith, from Natural Religion and man's moral constitution. Butler, Locke, Hartley, Clarke, Priestley (who professes to have derived most of his principles on the subject from Hartley), Jenyns, Paley, and very lately Lord Brougham, have all considered the cause of revealed religion to be strongly corroborated by what we know of God and duty by the light of nature. Our author finds this ground preoccupied by the Deists. Here they have entrenched themselves, and here they have erected their batteries against Christianity. They say, that revelation cannot be true, because it contains things which are inconsistent with the moral attributes of God, and the immutable distinctions of moral propriety established in the mind of man. Before any progress can be made in demonstrating the truth of Christianity, these assailants must be dislodged and discomfited. And this he attempts to do, not by reconciling with what are called the principles of Natural Theology and the moral sense, those parts of the



Scriptures to which the Deists object as being inconsistent with them, but by annihilating the ground on which they stand, and utterly denying that Natural Religion teaches us any thing with regard to God's *moral* attributes, and that our own moral constitution is any criterion by which to judge of the propriety or impropriety of the acts of the Deity. To this purpose more than a hundred pages are devoted before he proceeds to the direct proof. This he rests entirely on the credibility of the sacred writers as witnesses of a supernatural interposition to enlighten mankind. From the Scriptures, and from the Scriptures alone, he thinks, do we derive any evidence of the moral attributes of the Deity, and from them alone do we derive any moral distinctions, which are of sufficient authority to be applied as a test to the propriety of his moral actions. Whether he has done wisely in thus thinking to annihilate Natural Religion, the reader must judge.

Our Author begins by observing :

“Now before we can undertake to estimate the truth or falsehood of Christianity, it is of essential importance, that we first ascertain the actual value of the principles by which we are to make our decision. In other words we must accurately determine the following particulars :

“What is the actual amount of knowledge, that we derive from the study of Natural Theology ?

“What is the actual value of those principles, that constitute the Theory of Natural Religion ?

“What is the true theory of Moral Distinctions, *i. e.* what is it that makes one action to be right and another wrong ?

“What is it that constitutes a man a credible witness, and what is it that makes us mistrust and reject the testimony of another ?” — p. 24.

He then proceeds to estimate the value of the dogmas, as he calls them, which constitute Natural Religion.

“Our actual knowledge concerning the origin of religious dogmas, may be stated in a few words. The past history of mankind, exclusive of the Bible, does not communicate to us any information, how the theory of religious obligation has originated. The most ancient records of human transactions, in every instance, exhibit mankind as then living under the influence of religious institutions, and the latest discoveries of modern enterprise, in hitherto unexplored regions of the earth, inform us of a similar

religious condition of things, with every newly discovered nation. Hence it seems to be incontestable, that no nation, or people, have ever yet been discovered, who were destitute of the theory of religious obligation, and of which the following are the essential dogmas.

“1st. That there are gods, creators, and governors of the world, who rule all things, with both general and particular providence.

“2d. That all men are responsible beings before the gods, and accountable for their actions.

“3d. That the soul of man is immortal, and that, after the death of the body, it shall exist in either happiness or misery, according to the manner they may have lived in the present life.”

..... “Instead of speculating how these dogmas originated among men, we shall alone inquire into the value of the proofs or arguments by which they are sustained.” — p. 29.

These dogmas, to our great surprise, our Author, with the exception of the first, finds altogether unsupported by the appearances of the universe. After a labored discussion he comes to these conclusions concerning them, to our mind, we must confess, most extraordinary.

“1st. That our universe, and all it contains, is the production of intelligent power, but whether of one or more gods we cannot determine.

“2d. Of this god, or gods, we have not the smallest idea, except that he, or they, possess great power and intelligence; and it may be important to add, we are altogether unable to discern their possession of excellent attributes, such as benevolence, mercy, justice, &c.

“3d. We are unable to perceive, that the moral affairs of human life are superintended by any particular providence, and that universal experience opposes such a notion.

“4th. That there is not only no proof, but on the contrary it is against all fact, and the evidence of our senses, to believe that the intelligent principle of man is immortal, and consequently we have not the smallest reason to justify the theory of future reward or punishment. — p. 73.

Of these striking conclusions we have space to examine but one, and that is the proof of the Divine benevolence. This, every one must perceive, depends on the apparent predominance of happiness or misery, in those beings that are made capable of both.

“Now,” says our author, “with respect to mankind, there can



be no dispute, that human life is so much embittered by sorrow, affliction, and pain, so much by tyranny and oppression, so much by poverty and disease, that, in all ages, every moral writer whatever has exhibited human nature as being essentially unhappy; and death, however much we dread his approach, has ever been regarded as our great deliverer from the troubles of human life. The Scriptures decidedly take the same view, and, in short, none but certain advocates of natural theology, hold any other language on the question of fact." . . . . "As he (God) is, by his visible works, possessed of infinite power and intelligence, so, as he has not appointed a happy state and condition to human existence, it follows that we have no reason whatever to consider him good, from any view derivable from our experience of his providence." — pp. 46, 47.

He also contends, that, "with respect to the brute animals, a stronger position against the theory of the divine goodness may be sustained." And, in another place, he thus concludes; "If a man will have a positive dogma on the subject of the nature and attributes of the Creator, he can come to no other conclusion, reasoning only from nature and experience, than that the Deity was totally indifferent to human and animal happiness."

The facts here assumed, it will be perceived, rest entirely on individual opinion, an opinion which we confess we had never before either seen or heard expressed, except it may be in some moment of great suffering or passionate grief. The conclusions, then, which are drawn from them, will be satisfactory only to those, and we cannot help hoping they will be but a small number, who coincide with him in this opinion. But, supposing it proved that the Creator is "totally indifferent" to the happiness of his creatures, and man especially, — nay, more than this, that suffering actually preponderates, and, therefore, as our author has cut off all consideration of any compensation in a future state, that the balance inclines rather to the side of his malevolence; — this being proved, we seriously would inquire, if the foundations of revelation as well as natural religion be not equally shaken. It immediately establishes a presumption against a revelation. If God be "totally indifferent" to human welfare, it becomes improbable that he would make a revelation at all, if its purpose be to do man good; — much more, if he be in any degree malevolent. Besides, unless you consider the goodness of the Deity, and



his care for human happiness, to be proved by the light of nature, how can you possibly prove the truth of revelation ; — we do not here mean that it is a revelation, but that what is revealed is *true*? *You can place no dependence on the divine veracity.* Veracity is certainly a moral attribute ; and our author denies, that we can know any thing of the moral attributes of God by the light of nature. Veracity, moreover, in this case is blended with the divine goodness, and that, he says, has no evidence in nature. A God whose moral attributes are by supposition unknown, and who is “indifferent” to the happiness of mankind, would be quite as likely to deceive them in a revelation, as to create them in a condition “essentially unhappy.” Are we told that the Scriptures assert that God is true, and therefore his veracity may be proved from them? We answer, that this assertion makes a part of that very revelation, the truth of which cannot be proved, except by assuming as proved or made probable from some other source, that God himself is true. It is to be feared then, we think, that our author has made too great a sacrifice in order to silence the infidel objections derived from natural religion. *In giving up the moral attributes of the Deity as being antecedently unknown, and undiscoverable by the light of nature, he has abandoned the only ground on which revelation itself can be defended.*

Our author next proceeds to dispose of the objections brought by the Deists against the Scriptures, from what they call the immutability of moral distinctions. They say that the God of the Scriptures is represented in the Scriptures to have done this and that, which contradict our ideas of moral propriety, and therefore they are to be rejected as coming from him. This objection, which is similar to the last, he disposes of in much the same manner. He meets it by saying, that our ideas of moral propriety are relative only to ourselves, and totally inapplicable to the Deity ; and therefore we have no right to say that any thing whatever which has been done, or is said to have been done by him, is either right or wrong. He sums up the argument in the following manner.

“Then all that we claim for Christianity is, that it shall not be supposed condemnable for any statement it has made concerning Jehovah, or his proceeding with mankind, on the very intelligible ground, that we know nothing whatever concerning his nature and

attributes." . . . . "Every attempt to estimate the morality of God's act, by what is called the immutability of moral distinctions, has never failed in a single instance to end in error, folly, and mischief." . . . . "All that moralists have ever written on the subject of moral obligations, extends to no system more universal than is embraced by the word Philanthropy. Virtue and morality, justice, right, &c., are mere synonymes with philanthropy, and it is impossible for us to give them any other universality." — pp. 103, 92, 91.

We shall attempt briefly to examine the correctness of these positions. In the first place we observe, that they take for granted the truth of a hypothesis, which, to say the most, has as yet gained but few suffrages, and which seems to us to be positively false ; namely, that utility is not only the foundation of morality, and the safe and proper one for men to adopt when they come to years of discretion ; but that it is constituted the standard in the human mind from the first, — the first and only criterion by which the mind judges any act to be right or wrong. This, we repeat, we do not believe to be a fact. Of this every human being is a sufficient judge. He has only to ask himself, if to perceive any action to be calculated to promote the enjoyment of another, be the same as to perceive it to be right ? Is not the simple perception of right and wrong in the mind long antecedent to the complex perception of an action's being calculated to produce good on the whole ? Does not the child's consciousness of the criminality of lying, long precede his knowledge of the social evils, which at length grow out of it ?

Benevolence or philanthropy, so far from being the supreme authority of the mind, and the standard of action, is no authority at all. It is a motive, an affection, and belongs rather to the heart than the mind. It has a power above it, to which it is subjected, instead of reigning supreme, — this very sense of right and wrong. And we have no other evidence that it is good to be benevolent, except this very sense of right and wrong, which assures us that benevolence is right and malevolence is wrong. It is not a fact then, that all moral principle can be resolved into philanthropy. That God has so constituted the moral sense, that its instinctive judgments shall coincide with the greatest good of the human race, we do not deny. Such an ordination corresponds to that wisdom which forms the embryo bird or fish for the



element in which it is afterward to live. But that the perception of that good is the ground and constituent element of the moral sense, we utterly deny.

Whether right and wrong can be made universals or not, or whether they must be confined to the transactions and relations between man and man, will appear, if we analyze the ideas contained in this distinction, and consider what they imply. They imply an agent, with perception, choice, power, intention, and some sentient being to suffer or enjoy. Now, for one being to destroy the happiness of another being when innocent, strikes our minds as unjust, morally wrong. We know of no exception to this. The idea that it is wrong and unjust to make an innocent being miserable, on the whole, is as self-evident as that two and two make four. And it makes no difference whether the agent be God or man. It is impossible for us to view it in any other light. The circumstances of absolute property, and resistless power, make no difference. Might cannot make right, in the divine, any more than it can in human governments. Let the case but fairly be made out, and the mind decides as promptly in the one case as in the other.

It would not be a satisfactory answer then to the Deist, nor a fair one, when he objects that there are things in the Bible represented to have been done by the Deity which cannot be reconciled with our moral sense, to say that we know nothing as to what would be right or wrong in the Divine conduct. Our author's argument covers every possible supposition, and must be equally good in every supposable case. No matter what tissue of moral obliquity a revelation may charge upon God, it is all the same. He gives, then, the Deist, all he asks; a case utterly irreconcilable. All we can say then is, that the matter is brought to this dilemma, supposing such an indisputable case can be found in the Scriptures;—either that the God of the Scriptures is not good, or that the revelation does not come from him. Take the latter alternative, and its authority is gone of course. Take the former, and it is equally destroyed; for a revelation from a Being not good, can have no claim to our trust. Is it said that these Scriptures *assert* that he is good, and their assertion must be emphatically received as true? We answer, if they contain records of transactions on his part utterly irreconcilable with goodness, as the Deists affirm, and our

author supposes possible, then they likewise assert or imply that he is *not* good, and so contradict themselves, and thus neutralize their own authority.

Unless there be some fallacy in the preceding arguments, we fear we shall be compelled to conclude that the Deist's hands would be strengthened, instead of being palsied, by the proposed annihilation and abandonment of natural religion, and the denial of the applicability of moral distinctions to the Deity. And, if this be the case, we see not how we can avoid the conclusion, that the first hundred pages of the book have carried the author to a greater distance from his object, than he was when he commenced.

The next two chapters relate to the nature of the evidence by which the Scriptures are sustained as a Divine revelation. This he considers to rest on one point, the *credibility* of the writers. "In conformity with opinions already announced on a preceding page, I reiterate the belief, that the only sure argument upon which we can receive the Christian religion as a Divine institution, depends upon the absolute credibility of the biblical writers. If we can prove them absolutely free from every imputation of knavery and fraud, I cannot see how their testimony can be rejected."

There is much valuable matter in these chapters, particularly on the subject of miracles. We have never seen this subject yet set in its true and proper light. "Since a past miracle can have no argument or demonstration of its truth embodied in itself, but is absolutely dependent on historic relation, I apprehend they cannot in themselves be brought forward as matters of evidence to us at the present day. Their whole force, as divine evidence, appears to have been exhausted on the eye-witnesses." And yet we suppose the writer would agree with the Apostle, that, if Christ be not risen, our faith is vain, and Christianity a delusion. What ground then do they occupy? We confess we have never seen this subject thoroughly investigated. We are disposed, however, to give "credibility" of the witnesses a much wider signification than our author. He makes it to rest exclusively on their honesty and disinterestedness. We apprehend that he has confounded two things here, which it is necessary to keep distinct; because the mind always does so in weighing testimony. This distinction is between the credibility of the witnesses, and the credibility of the facts to which they



testify, as supported by their testimony. This latter depends, in a great measure, on the nature of the facts themselves, their antecedent probability, their consistency with the known laws of nature, and with each other. Thus, when we read the testimonies of the Apostles concerning Christ, we do not look solely at the apparent sincerity and honesty which they exhibit, but likewise at the intrinsic probability and consistency of their narrative. We cannot keep out of our mind the probability or improbability of God's making a revelation at all, at such a time and such a place, the character of Christ and his religion, and other particulars of the same general description. These are considerations, which we cannot possibly separate from our estimate of the credibility of the facts, even if we would. When, therefore, our author asserts, that he rests the truth of Christianity on the honesty and disinterestedness of the witnesses, he must be understood as expressing only an individual opinion, stating merely what seems the strong point to *him*.

And this leads us to express a conviction long entertained, and which this publication has contributed to strengthen, of the almost entire inutility of one man's writing books of Evidences for another, and almost, indeed, of writing books of Evidences at all. The evidences are plainly cumulative in their nature, and are most convincing, when viewed by the mind at once, and are rather weakened when separately discussed. Bacon's censure of the Schoolmen applies here with the greatest force. "*Questionum minutiis scientiarum frangunt soliditatem.*" "Considered as a whole," he proceeds to say, "like the fabled Scylla, it seems beautiful and specious; but when you descend into distinctions, it ends in monstrous altercations and barking questions."

One argument strikes one, and another another. More than a hundred years ago, Locke wrote a book to show that Christianity was to be believed because it is reasonable. A half-century later Soame Jenyns wrote another, to show that it is to be believed because it is unreasonable, so utterly contradictory to the principles of the human understanding, that the mind of man could never have invented it. Lord Brougham, on the other side of the Atlantic, publishes a book in which he asserts, that miracles even cannot substantiate a revelation which contradicts the principles of Natural Religion. Almost simultaneously a book comes out in America,

which annihilates Natural Religion altogether, and denies that it has a single dogma of sufficient certainty to form a criterion by which to judge of the claims of a revelation. It is plain, that no progress can be made in this way in the conviction of skeptics. They have only to set the different defenders of the cause to quarrelling with each other, and thus neutralize their authority. Let each state his own grounds, but let him not attempt to invalidate the arguments of the other. Let them do so, and this very fact, that there are so many independent minds, convinced by independent arguments, will show the richness and variety of the evidence, and thus demonstrate, that, when aggregated instead of divided, it must be absolutely overwhelming.

The Bible, if it be from God, we may be sure, addresses men in the best possible manner; and if it does not convince them, just as it is, it must arise from some mental or moral obliquity, which argumentation will be the last thing to cure. And, paradoxical as it may seem, we believe that discourses on the Evidences are generally among the most useless which fall from our pulpits, even in congregations where doubt is most prevalent. They suggest two objections where they answer one, and are almost always found, in the end, to unsettle many more minds than they confirm.

We do not, of course, mean to say, that there is any deficiency in the evidence by which revelation is supported; we speak merely of the mode and need of its formal exhibition and examination. "*The whole need not a physician, but those that are sick.*" As for those whose faith has been disturbed by deistical books or arguments, they may be occasionally benefited by books of Evidences. Still we believe the great battle is fought over the sacred pages, with very little foreign aid. The process through which the commonest mind passes, is strictly philosophical; quite as much so, as if guided by the greatest masters of formal logic. It is, we believe, something like this. "Here is a book *unique* in every particular. Its doctrines concerning the Divine Nature are immeasurably more pure and exalted, than those of any other book or system of religion that the world has else exhibited. Its doctrines concerning our moral and spiritual nature find a witness in the inner man, of their truth. Humanity, under its auspices, rises to a purity, strength, perfection, and happiness, unimagined even by the human mind without it. The God



which it reveals is the same God we see in nature, and is represented to have interrupted the laws of nature in order to give man evidence of his interposition, in a manner not unsuited to the dignity and benevolence of his character. We see, moreover, in the character of Christ, a moral miracle, quite as striking as any change in the physical universe could be. These are actual facts, phenomena, presented to the mind for its explanation. It must have some theory of their origin. Which is the most probable, revelation or fiction?" Now we aver, that no book ever has exhibited, or ever can exhibit these considerations with the force, and comprehensiveness, and concentration, with which they are presented by the Bible itself. The famous treatise of Dr. Paley, concerning "the labors, dangers, and sufferings of the Apostles," as utterly fails of bringing before the mind the broad and general grounds of belief in Christianity, as a narrow arm of the sea fails of exhibiting the vastness and depth of the ocean. We doubt whether one reader in ten of that book ever thought of resting his faith on that individual point, on which he lays the whole stress.

The most substantial and valuable part of this book is the chapters on the constitution of the Jewish church and state. Much of this is certainly new and very ably handled. The author shows conclusively, from the independence of the orders of the Priests, the Prophets, and the Kings on each other, that there is absolutely no room for suspicion of collusion and fraud. We commend these chapters to all thinking men, and especially to the clergy, as containing much that will strike them as fresh and valuable.

Our readers will be curious, we suppose, to know what our author, having proved the truth of revelation, considers it to teach. This division, on Doctrines, though not the most important, is certainly the most curious part of the work. If the opinions there expressed may be considered, and we are inclined to think they may be, as the index of progress of mind on these subjects in this country among men of information, they lead us to some gratifying conclusions. The position occupied by our author may be pretty well calculated, when we say, that he discards the doctrines of Original Sin and the Trinity. Indeed, we have never seen the doctrine of Original Sin more lucidly and ably refuted.

“That all men,” he says, “without exception, are more or less sinful in their lives before Jehovah, arises not from any inherent taint or corruption, such as is imagined by the theory of Original Sin, but from the fact that we are intellectual and moral beings of an imperfect constitution, undergoing a probationary discipline before him as free agents. As such, exercised on the perfect law of Jehovah, we sometimes do right, and sometimes we do wrong. How could it be otherwise? The very theory of our probation anticipates our disobedience as well as our obedience. What else could be expected of free agents under trial? If any man could keep the law of Jehovah perfectly, he is a perfect being, and no longer in an imperfect condition.” — p. 271.

“If Adam and Eve fell without any taint of Original Sin, why should our transgressions be considered a proof of the existence of Original Sin in us? Adam and Eve’s transgression was not less in its moral obliquity than any of our offences. If they therefore sinned without Original Sin, it never can be inferred that our transgressions proceed from that source.” — p. 267.

“With this plain exhibition of the fallacy of the doctrine of Original Sin, I apprehend that we are not required to discourse at large upon predestination, election, effectual calling, perseverance of the saints, and sundry other doctrines growing out of the theory of Original Sin. These all fall together by the exposition we have made above; for they are not taught in the Scriptures, and are but doctrines of men made through unjustifiable inferences.” — pp. 274, 275.

On the doctrine of the Trinity he is equally explicit. Though he refuses to speculate, he rejects this doctrine as not contained in Scripture.

“Nothing can be clearer, nor more distinctly expressed in the Scripture, than that God, meaning thereby Jehovah, is one. — THERE IS BUT ONE GOD. — This is also the doctrine of the Trinitarians; there is but one God, though there are three persons in the Godhead.

“But, do the Scriptures anywhere use the word *Trinity*? Do the Scriptures anywhere say, there are three persons in the Godhead? No, not in a single text, for the oft-quoted passage of 1 John v. 7, has been, long since, shown to be a corruption, and is admitted to be so by all the more eminent critics of the present day.

“The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is one which men have inferred from the Scripture writings, and is not a doctrine of formal revelation.” — p. 278.



A person, who had been accustomed to divide the Christian world into two classes, Unitarians and Trinitarians, would have no hesitation, we imagine, in placing the writer of the above in the former class, but in the following paragraphs he would find himself corrected.

“But if the doctrine of the Trinitarians be presumptuous and contrary to the exhibition of the Scripture writings, what must we say of that of the Socinians or modern Unitarians? I am at a loss how to express myself upon this subject; on the one hand they profess to found their belief on the Scriptures, and largely quote it to prove their doctrine. On the other hand, as I understand the Scriptures, I have no hesitation in stating my opinion, that their expositions and doctrine, in its important features, are directly contrary to the whole scope and tenor of the Scripture writings. I have no right to impugn the honesty or sincerity of the Socinians, but I am perfectly at a loss how to reconcile their opinions with the Scriptures. Judging by the light of my own understanding and conscience, I do consider the doctrines of modern Unitarians to be entirely subversive of the Christian religion, so far as I can comprehend the subject; and, this being the case, I will not hesitate to bear my testimony against such opinions. If the Scriptures do teach us, and I am clear on this point, that salvation from our sins is only to be attained through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and in virtue of that intercession that he makes continually with the Father for us, so I cannot consider the Unitarian doctrine other than an absolute departure from the theory of the Scriptures, and a formal rejection of that salvation which God has freely offered to us. To reject the mode that God has appointed, leaves no alternative and no hope. What then shall the end of this be?

“In the course of a very general reading upon the moral and religious speculations of men, I have been often disturbed by the extreme difference that sometimes existed between their views and my own, but with none have I been so much disposed to lose patience as with the Socinian writings. The excellent Archbishop Tillotson, on one occasion, speaks of Socinus as ‘a great master of reason,’ and which I shall concede to be the fact from such commendation, for I have never seen his works; but I defy any other sect of Christians, except the Unitarians, to read the works of Priestly [Priestley], of Belsham, Evanson, and other of their champions, without being amazed at their reasons, and shocked with their apparent presumption.

“But though I consider the Trinitarian doctrine to want Scriptural authority, and that of the Socinians to be altogether con-

tradictory to the Scriptures, I cannot advocate the hypothesis of the Arians. I cannot but consider it presumptuous to determine so incomprehensible a subject according to any hypothesis." — pp. 280, 281.

We had hitherto supposed that all possible opinions concerning the nature and dignity of Christ were comprehended under the three denominations of Unitarian, Arian (which is in reality Unitarian), and Trinitarian. But here is attempted, not a *tertium*, but a *quartum quid*, irreducible to any known category, because undefined. How far it may be possible for a human mind to think of Christ at all without assigning him any specific rank in the universe, we shall not assume the province of determining. If we examine the thing a little closer, we shall find that our author has a greater dread of heretical *names* than heretical sentiments. For, while he denies the Trinity, he denounces the Unitarians; and, while he disclaims the name of Arian, he hesitates not to advance Arian opinions, for in one place he expresses himself thus; — "Jesus Christ, whom he of his infinite mercy sent into the world from a state of preëxisting glory, that we might be saved from our sins." Now how a man, who entertains such an opinion, can be other than an Arian of some species, as that term is commonly received, we confess ourselves unable to see. And, what is still more surprising, in advancing this sentiment we find him treading the very ground which he has forbidden to others, founding doctrines on inferences. It is nowhere expressly asserted that Christ existed in a previous state of glory. Robert Hall, one of the most able, earnest, and, we may add, bitter advocates of the doctrine of the Trinity, admits that it is merely a doctrine of inference, except in one passage, — "Before Abraham was, I am," — and this passage, when examined, will be found to have quite as great ambiguity as the rest. It does not positively assert that Christ existed before Abraham, because the verb is in the present tense. It may not be a verb of existence at all, but only of affirmation, and used, just as it is in other cases, with the ellipsis of *he*, or the *Messiah*; as when he says, "If ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins;" that is, "that I am *he*," or the *Messiah*. It may mean, therefore, according to the current use of language in the Scriptures, that Jesus was personally promised, or designated in the counsels of Jehovah, as the *Messiah*, before the days of Abraham.

Biblical criticism is not a subject with which we have a right to expect a layman to be intimately acquainted. From the specimens we have of it in this book, we should hardly suppose the author to have examined this subject with sufficient accuracy to justify a positive, not to say, dogmatic opinion upon it. For in the very paragraph, in which he speaks of the preëxistent glory of Christ, he quotes the Scripture as saying, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ." The words of Scripture are, "the *man* Christ Jesus." Another passage he quotes as bearing decisively on this subject. "*Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend unto heaven? that is, to bring Christ down from above; or, Who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.*" Deeper investigation would have convinced him, according to the opinion of the best commentators, that Christ is here, by a common metonymy, put for his doctrine or religion.

Of the facility with which *he* likewise can draw unauthorized inferences from the Scriptures, we have still further proof in this very passage. He goes on to quote. "*But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*" In other words Paul observes, 'Do not concern yourselves how Christ descended from heaven, nor how he again ascended to his glory; believe the fact, that he did descend, and that he again ascended with power sufficient to save as many as shall call upon him.'" Now we affirm, that, in this very passage, St. Paul makes saving faith to comprehend no such article as the descent of Christ from heaven, or from a state of preëxistent glory. The only essential article is his resurrection from the dead,—"and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Will not this, we ask, comprehend the simplest form of Unitarianism?

This brings us to our last topic, his denunciation of the Unitarians and his reasons for it. It cannot be certainly for the main article of their creed, that from which they derive their name,—their maintenance of the simple unity of God in opposition to a Trinity; for in that opinion he coincides. And, by so doing, he must subject himself to the bitter revil-



ings, which that sect suffers on all sides. Those who maintain the Trinity, he must be aware, consider that between them and all others, there is a great gulf fixed. But our author, though a Unitarian in some sense, is sure that he is on the safe side of the gulf, and that that gulf is not the Trinity, but the Atonement. "If the Scriptures do teach us, and I am clear on this point, that salvation from our sins is only to be attained through the sacrificial death of Christ, and in virtue of that intercession that he makes continually with the Father for us, so I cannot consider the Unitarian doctrine other than an absolute departure from the theory of the Scriptures, and a formal rejection of that salvation, which God has freely offered to us. To reject the mode that God has appointed, leaves no alternative and no hope."

We cannot but be astonished at the rashness with which charges so grave are made, and a doom so dreadful is denounced, upon specifications so exceedingly vague and indefinite. Such is the extreme ambiguity of the language used in this passage, such the number of distinct propositions which it may contain, the denial of either of which may be fraught with unutterable peril, that we must examine them in detail. "Salvation from our sins is only to be attained through the sacrificial death and intercession of Christ" may mean, in the first place, that our past sins could not have been pardoned on repentance, had they not been expiated by Christ; or it may mean, that our deliverance from the dominion and practice of sin can be accomplished only by those divine aids which were purchased by his death; or it may mean simply, that Christ sacrificed his life to persuade men to renounce sin. It may mean that sincere repentance, and all other acts and exercises of a religious man, are inefficacious and unacceptable unless accompanied by this specific element of belief, that the death of Christ was sacrificial and expiatory. Now, in the denial of which of all these possible meanings of this allegation, lies the deadly delinquency of the Unitarians? Suppose it to lie in the last, which on the whole, is more probable, we ask if it be either reasonable or scriptural to suppose, that a sincere penitent Christian man must inevitably be lost, because he does not look on the death of Christ as sacrificial and propitiatory? If the death of Christ be propitiatory and expiatory, it must be so independently of human belief or unbelief. It is a transaction finished and completed ages ago. If it was in-

tended to produce an effect on God to remove any obstacle in him or in his law, that obstacle has been removed. The only fact, in which practical faith can be at all interested, is the fact, that God is now ready to pardon sin on sincere repentance. The practical point is the readiness, not the manner in which it has been brought about. There is no greater inducement to repentance and obedience, on the supposition that Christ died to produce that readiness, than on the supposition that he died to give mankind assurance of it. And, even admitting the sacrificial and expiatory nature of Christ's death to be true, it cannot be proved that even those who fail to recognise it as such, are to be shut out from the benefits of it, unless it can be shown from the Scriptures that God has specified this element of faith in Christ, that his death was sacrificial and propitiatory, as indispensable, superadded to all other requirements. The matter then is reduced to a question of fact, Has he made such a requirement? We affirm that he has not. And instead of running over all the texts of Scripture on this subject, we shall recur to the author's own view of atonement and saving faith, which he has formally summed up, a mode of proceeding which ought certainly to be satisfactory to him. "*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*" Here is the fundamental and all-comprehending article of Christian faith according to our author, but not one word in it of the sacrificial and expiatory nature of the death of Christ. We do not say too much, then, when we affirm, that he is not only narrowly bigoted, but grossly inconsistent, in condemning Unitarians as lost.

But the ambiguities of this unsparing condemnation are not yet exhausted. A sentence of so grave a nature as inevitable perdition, one would suppose, ought to rest on charges most specific in their statement, and most explicitly made out. "To reject the mode that God has appointed leaves no alternative and no hope." The most natural meaning of *reject*, is to refuse to accept, to refuse to act upon or avail one's self of any thing. Now it does not appear, according to our author's own showing, that the death of Christ, as far as it was sacrificial, has ever been offered to man either for his acceptance or rejection. God, to whom it was addressed, has already accepted it. Man can accept or reject only what is offered

to him. Not the alternative of believing or not believing, that the death of Christ was sacrificial, is offered to man, but of accepting or not accepting the mercy of God thus procured, on condition of true repentance and sincere obedience. And do Unitarians reject the mode which God has appointed in this sense? As far as human judgment is concerned, their lives and characters must answer. If their lives and characters will not suffer by a comparison with the mass of their fellow Christians of other denominations, if their faith in Christ, evinced by their reception of his revelation as the word of God, and worshipping the Father in his name, and, in the midst of persecution and reproach, building temples for the inculcation of his religion, has the power to purify the heart and overcome the world, we know of no sense, except one of the most narrow and irrational bigotry, in which they can be said to reject the mode of salvation which God has offered. Of all men, we should suppose, that our Author ought to beware of wholesale denunciations for mere shades of faith, after such tremendous departures from Orthodoxy as he avows in this book. He must be aware that he

“but teaches  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague the inventor.”

He must be aware, that, if he establishes the principle that a precisely accurate faith as to the nature of the Atonement be necessary to salvation, the great mass of Christians may mourn over him as quite as liable to damnation, quite as guilty of “rejecting the only mode that God has offered,” in failing to recognise the infinite nature of the Victim, as the Unitarians are in failing to perceive that the death of Christ was literally an expiatory sacrifice. Further and more enlarged investigations, we are sure, would convince him that the nature of the Atonement is such, that, among those who believe the fundamental proposition, which he himself has laid down as the corner-stone, the resurrection of Christ, the only fatal heresy is a wicked, irreligious life; that Atonement is a practical, not a speculative subject, reconciliation to God by repentance and reformation, “when by wicked works we were enemies to him;” and that every man receives the benefits of it just so far as he, by a religious life, enjoys peace with God, and the testimony of a good conscience.



His violent prejudices against the Unitarians seem principally to have been excited, not by the general doctrines of the sect, but by some particular passages or statements of some of their champions, such as Priestley, Evanson, and Belsham. He ought to be sure, that the whole denomination participate in those obnoxious sentiments, before he condemns them in a body. Priestley, though one of the greatest men, and one of the sincerest and humblest Christians, who have ever lived, mingled with his religious opinions some philosophical dogmas, which have no more connexion with those opinions than with any other creed, — materialism and philosophical necessity, — dogmas, which, whether true or false, cannot but be chilling and revolting to the great mass of mankind, and would be sufficient, we fear, to sink any religious system, however true, to which they might be attached. He has, besides, on religious topics, advanced some sentiments, and adopted some modes of expression, for which it would be altogether unjust to make all who are denominated Unitarians responsible. The head and front of Evanson's offending consists in having collected and arranged the facts, that altogether annihilate the doctrine of verbal inspiration, which was so long and so obstinately maintained, but which all, who have any tolerable acquaintance with the subject, now perceive it to be necessary to abandon, in order to sustain the divine authority of the Scriptures. And we are sorry to see men, high in place, disingenuous enough, in order to excite horror against the sect among the common people, to criminate the Unitarians, and join in the outcry against them for advocating a theory which they know to be true, and without which they know that inspiration of any kind cannot be sustained for a moment. Mr. Belsham may have been unfortunate in his modes of expression, and extravagant in some of his positions, and may have shocked some even of his own denomination, as well as many out of it; but we believe, that those, who follow in his steps of patient, careful, learned investigation, will always find it more easy to be shocked with his presumption, than to answer his arguments.

One word more on the use of names. It is a standing maxim of the low morality of the world, that "all is fair in politics." Would that we could say that the same principle is not acted upon, though not avowed, in polemical discussion, and in the tactics of sectarian struggle. Here we have a gen-

tleman, who maintains the character of high moral worth, and who would scorn to utter a slander or a base insinuation of any kind; and yet we find him applying the name "Socinian" to a large body of professed disciples of Christ, without even, according to his own confession, having read the works of Socinus, or knowing of course, what his peculiar opinions were, or whether there was any coincidence between them and the opinions of modern Unitarians. But he *did* know, that the Unitarians of the present day disclaim that name, and that the word *Socinian* has been for centuries a nucleus of all evil and hateful associations, which, in the minds of many, may be said instantly to defile and pollute any thing to which it is applied.

To use our author's language, there is nothing with which we are so apt to lose patience, as with the moral obliquity and fraud, which are exhibited in the pulpits of this land every Sabbath day. We see men stand up there as the advocates of justice and righteousness, truth and honesty, and, in the same breath, couple together, in one sweeping anathema, Atheists, Infidels, and Unitarians. Do they not know, that the impression they make upon their uninformed hearers is slanderous and false? Do they not know, that they are doing what in civil affairs would be an indictable offence, and be followed by prosecution, and the loss of moral character and all honorable reputation? Do they not feel the gross injustice, the cruel wrong, which they do their brethren, when, to excite odium against them, they class them with the deniers of a God, and the rejecters of all revelation;—men, who worship God and revere the Saviour, and who labor, according to their own views of truth and duty, to build up his cause? However the Unitarians may fall behind their opponents in professions of piety, we hope that they may never be left to fall so low in point of morality, as to endeavour to throw odium on their adversaries by invidious names and slanderous classifications.

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